

Frindle



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ANDREW CLEMENTS

Clements's family lived in several New Jersey towns before moving to Illinois when Andrew Clements was in the sixth grade. The family spent its summers on a lake in Maine with no television or phone, which Clements credits with giving him ample time to read. Clements studied English at Northwestern University and after teaching writing at several high school summer workshops, he decided to become a teacher. He earned his MA in teaching at National Louis University and then spent seven years teaching fourth grade, eighth grade, and high school outside of Chicago. He married and had his first son during this time. He and his family moved to New York City when budget cuts made it seem as though Clements's job wasn't secure. There, he briefly worked as a singer-songwriter and then entered the world of publishing. His colleagues in the publishing industry helped him write his first children's picture books and, after working on the idea for six years, Clements published *Frindle*. He's published a number of other award-winning children's books since then and currently lives with his wife in Maine.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The earliest "dictionaries" come from the Akkadian Empire and date to around 2300 BCE. Though there have been a number of dictionary-like reference texts from cultures around the world since then, most of them dealt with translating from other languages or grouped words by category rather than alphabetically. The first English-only alphabetical dictionary was published in 1604 by Robert Cawdrey, though many people considered it unreliable. 150 years later, in 1755, Samuel Johnson published *A Dictionary of the English Language*, which is considered to be the first modern dictionary. In the United States, Noah Webster began publishing dictionaries in 1806, though it wasn't until 1828 that he published *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, which contained thousands of words that had never been published in British English dictionaries before. Webster was a spelling reformer and his dictionary was instrumental in differentiating between British English and American English. Dictionaries add words constantly, and as with "frindle," the new words reflect changes in the way people communicate with each other and often emerge from fringe groups before entering the general lexicon and making it into the official dictionary. In 2015, the Oxford Dictionaries even named an emoji as their Word of the Year.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Andrew Clements has written a number of novels for elementary-age readers, including *No Talking*, *The Report Card*, and *Lunch Money*. Other novels for this age group that deal with language and learning specifically include Sharon Creech's *Love That Dog* and *Hate That Cat*, and Esme Raji Codell's *Sahara Special*. For older readers, Carl Hiaasen's series of eco-mysteries, beginning with *Hoot*, shows students working together to protest and stand up for their beliefs, something that Nick and his friends model in *Frindle*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Frindle
- **When Written:** 1990-1996
- **Where Written:** New York, NY
- **When Published:** 1996
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Children's Fiction
- **Setting:** Westfield, New Hampshire
- **Climax:** The battle between Mrs. Granger and Nick ends with the inclusion of "frindle" in the dictionary
- **Antagonist:** Mrs. Granger, though this is revealed to be a role she chose to play, not something indicative of her true beliefs
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Close, but not quite. Though *Frindle* states the story of Richard Daley creating the word "quiz" out of thin air as fact, in truth, the word had been around for about ten years before the origin story allegedly took place. The word likely originated as a slang word used by students, in much the same way that Nick creates "frindle."

Phoenix. Despite *Frindle*'s popularity and the many smaller awards it won when it was first published, the novel didn't win any major awards for children's books. Because of this, in 2016 *Frindle* earned the Phoenix Award, which, according to the Children's Literature Association, "is intended to recognize books of high literary merit, which never won award at the time of publication, and which are still worthy of recognition."



PLOT SUMMARY

Nick Allen isn't a bad kid, but he does have lots of ideas and enjoys tormenting his teachers with them. In third grade, he convinced Miss Deaver to let the class turn the classroom into

a tropical island. Then, in fourth grade, Nick learned that blackbirds make high-pitched noises to confuse birds of prey, and noticed that his teacher, Mrs. Avery, looked like a hawk. He and one of his classmates, Janet Fisk, made high-pitched bird noises all year long to annoy Mrs. Avery—and she never caught them.

Entering fifth grade represents a turning point for Lincoln Elementary students. They no longer get recess, they get real letter grades, and they all get Mrs. Granger for language arts. Mrs. Granger has a reputation for being strict and assigning lots of homework, especially vocabulary homework. She also loves the **dictionary**. A few weeks before school begins, Nick's parents receive a letter from Mrs. Granger explaining that Nick needs to have access to a good dictionary for homework. Nick just groans.

On the first day of school, Mrs. Granger starts things off with a vocabulary test. Right before the period ends, Nick decides to deploy the "teacher-stopper," a question designed to keep teachers from assigning homework. He asks Mrs. Granger where the words in the dictionaries come from. Rather than tell him, Mrs. Granger asks Nick to research it himself and present his findings to the class the next day. After school, Nick grudgingly does Mrs. Granger's vocabulary homework and then turns to his report. Nick looks up "dictionary" in both the adult and children's encyclopedias and then comes up with one of his big ideas.

In Mrs. Granger's class the next day, Nick gives his presentation. Mrs. Granger loves it for the first eighteen minutes, but then she seems to understand that Nick is trying to drag his presentation out as long as possible. Finally, with ten minutes left in the period, she makes him stop. Nick doesn't stop there, however; he asks Mrs. Granger why words mean different things. Mrs. Granger explains that Nick and all other English speakers decide what words mean, and says that if everyone started to use a different word for something, it'd eventually end up in the dictionary.

That afternoon, Nick and Janet walk home together. Janet finds a gold pen in the street, but Nick is lost in thought about what Mrs. Granger said about words and why they mean what they do. He remembers that when he was a toddler, his parents knew he wanted to listen to music when he said "gwagala." Nick is so absorbed that he bumps into Janet and sends her pen flying. He apologizes, and as he hands Janet the pen, he calls it a frindle. The next afternoon, he stops at a shop and asks the saleslady for a frindle. She doesn't understand what he wants until he points to a pen. However, after six days of having kids ask for "frindles," the lady knows what Janet wants when she asks for a frindle. Nick and his friends take an oath to only use "frindle" and never say "pen" again.

The next day in Mrs. Granger's class, Nick and one of his friends make a show of Nick forgetting his frindle. The other kids laugh, but Mrs. Granger isn't amused. After class she asks Nick to not

interrupt her with funny ideas. Nick looks innocent, insists he truly did forget his frindle, and promises to never forget his frindle again. Two days later, the school takes everyone's class photos. The fifth grade group photo is last. When the photographer asks the kids to say cheese, every child says "frindle!" and holds out a pen. Mrs. Granger is furious, but all the other kids at school think it's funny and start using "frindle." This leads Mrs. Granger to start giving kids detention for using "frindle," though detention with Mrs. Granger becomes a badge of honor rather than a punishment.

After a week or so, Mrs. Granger declares that "frindle" has gone far enough, but Nick notes that he's just putting Mrs. Granger's lessons on language into practice in the real world. He's not swayed when Mrs. Granger points out that the word "pen" has a rich history that makes sense, but Mrs. Granger seems unsurprised by his reaction. She asks Nick to sign and date the back of an envelope containing a letter for him, which she promises to deliver when this whole thing is over.

The next day, one of Nick's friends suggests that they get the entire class to individually ask Mrs. Granger for a frindle, reasoning that she can't keep everyone for detention. Mrs. Granger keeps 80 students that day and 200 the next. The principal, Mrs. Chatham, decides to visit Nick's parents to discuss the issue. Mrs. Chatham tells Mrs. and Mr. Allen her version of events, which is that the kids ruined the class photo and aren't respecting rules anymore. Mrs. Allen looks annoyed and states that the whole thing sounds like a gross overreaction to kids testing out a new word, but Mrs. Chatham says that they need to stop "frindle" for the same reason they need to keep children from using "ain't": standards. The adults are stumped when Nick points out that "ain't" is in the dictionary. Mrs. Allen repeats her point and soon, Mrs. Chatham leaves. Nick tells his parents that he never meant to be disrespectful and tells his dad that he can't make it stop—it's no longer just his word anymore.

The next day, a reporter named Judy Morgan hears that there's a revolt going on at Lincoln Elementary. The secretary, Mrs. Freed, is immediately annoyed when Judy asks to speak to someone about the "frindle" business but shows her in to see Mrs. Chatham. Mrs. Chatham tells Judy that it's a silly prank and an overreaction, but Judy can tell that Mrs. Chatham doesn't want to actually talk about it. Judy then goes to speak to Mrs. Granger. Mrs. Granger seems convinced that "frindle" will fall out of fashion soon and shares that a boy named Nick Allen started the whole thing. As Judy heads out to the parking lot, she runs into a group of students who just finished serving detention with Mrs. Granger. They're all excited to be part of a movement, but tell Judy that Nick probably won't want to talk to her. The next day, Judy receives an envelope at work containing the fifth grade class picture. Someone wrote on the back which kid is Nick.

On Thursday when *The Westfield Gazette* comes out, Judy's

article about "frindle" is on the front page. The entire town is in an uproar. Kids in middle and high school start using the word, and Nick becomes a celebrity overnight. Bud Lawrence, a local businessman, begins selling pens with "frindle" printed on them and files a preliminary trademark on the word. A few days after the article comes out, Alice Lunderson, a CBS employee, reads Judy's article. It attracts the attention of the national CBS station in New York, and they give Alice permission to put together a piece for the evening news. Alice interviews Mrs. Granger, who insists that kids need to learn that language has rules, and then interviews the Allen family. Nick nervously explains that he was just testing out what he learned from Mrs. Granger and credits her for teaching him so much about words. After the segment airs, Nick is asked to give interviews on television and magazines.

Bud Lawrence's sales pick up, though his lawyer explains to him that now that everyone in the country knows that Nick invented the word "frindle," they'll need to make a deal with the Allen family to use the word. When Bud asks Mr. Allen to come to his office to chat, he sees that getting the rights to the word will be easy: Mr. Allen is overwhelmed and wants all the attention to stop. Mr. Allen agrees to sign a contract giving Nick 30 percent of the profits from frindle-branded merchandise and accepts a check for 2,250 dollars, Nick's cut of proceeds from the first week. Mr. Allen sets up a secret savings trust for Nick. Bud deposits bigger and bigger checks into Nick's account and the city council votes to put a "frindle" sign up in town. Mrs. Granger continues to insist that kids use "pen," but they all refuse.

Nick struggles to fully recover from his brush with fame. His ideas start to scare him a bit. When he learns about consumers, he thinks that he can use his new knowledge to get his classmates to boycott the cafeteria food until it improves, but he's too afraid of getting in trouble to tell anyone about it. He also thinks that Mrs. Granger forgot about the letter she wrote him. On the last day of school, he goes to ask her about it. She insists that the "frindle" thing isn't actually over yet, so he can't have the letter. She does tell him that she's actually proud of how he handled things and tells him to not be afraid of his big ideas. Mrs. Granger shakes Nick's hand and says she knows he'll do great things. This gives Nick the confidence to be proud of what he did. Two years later, he does convince students to boycott the cafeteria food, making Westfield's lunch program into the best in the state.

Ten years later, Nick turns 21 and gets control of the "frindle" savings account. He gives money to his family and then tries to forget about it. He also receives a package from Mrs. Granger. The package contains a new edition of *Webster's College Dictionary*, which has an entry for "frindle." It also contains Mrs. Granger's letter. It says that she's actually excited about Nick's new word and that she's choosing to play the villain. She writes that she loves the dictionary because it remains relevant even

as things change, and it too can change and adapt. Also in the box is Mrs. Granger's favorite pen, with a note saying "frindle" clipped to it.

On Christmas morning, Mrs. Granger finds an official-looking envelope and a gift on her front porch. The envelope congratulates Mrs. Granger and explains that with a donation of one million dollars, a former student started a scholarship fund in her name. She thinks it must be a mistake, but turns to the gift. It contains a beautiful gold pen. The pen is engraved and says that Mrs. Granger can call the object whatever she wants. It's from Nick Allen.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Nick Allen – Nick is the ten-year-old protagonist of the novel. He's known for his big ideas, which he often deploys to annoy his teachers and undermine their power. Fifth grade, however, presents new challenges for Nick, as Mrs. Granger knows all of his tricks to evade homework and stall class, like asking open-ended questions about what words mean. Nick takes seriously Mrs. Granger's resulting assignment to research the history of the **dictionary** and turns it around on her—his presentation on the dictionary lasts almost the entire length of the class. When Mrs. Granger explains that all English speakers create the language and decide what words mean, Nick decides to test this by renaming pens "frindles." Within a few days, "frindle" catches on at school and Nick manages to "ruin" the fifth grade class photo by convincing every kid in his class to say "frindle" and hold out a pen. When Mrs. Granger tries to get Nick to stop, he feigns innocence and insists he's just putting her lessons into action. He takes a similar stance when Mrs. Chatham, the principal, comes to talk to his parents about the "frindle" business at school. Nick soon finds that fame comes with a great deal of responsibility. He becomes quiet and withdrawn as people expect him to be witty and funny all the time, and Nick starts to fear his big ideas and drawing attention to himself. It's not until Mrs. Granger assures Nick that he did nothing wrong and compliments his ideas that he regains his confidence. Ten years later, "frindle" enters the dictionary, and Nick gets access to the secret account Mr. Allen set up for the royalty money. Nick generously chooses to set up a scholarship fund in Mrs. Granger's name, using his fame to meaningfully help others.

Mrs. Granger – Mrs. Granger, Nick's teacher, is the only fifth grade language arts teacher at Lincoln Elementary. She's a small older woman who only wears skirt suits, and she can "turn on" her eyes in such a way as to make students shrink. Mrs. Granger is known for assigning lots of homework and requires all her students to have a copy of her preferred **dictionary** so they can properly complete their homework. Rather than play

along and allow Nick to sidetrack her, Mrs. Granger assigns Nick more homework so he can answer his questions about the dictionary for himself. This begins a battle of wills between the two as Nick tries to distract Mrs. Granger. However, Mrs. Granger only takes offense to the fact that Nick is trying to disrupt class; she's happy to talk about the dictionary, how words make it into the dictionary, and the rules governing the English language and how it changes. When Nick comes up with the idea to rename pens "frindles," Mrs. Granger is at first annoyed and angry. She reprimands Nick several times and keeps as many as 200 students for detention as punishment for using "frindle" instead of "pen." After a few weeks, Mrs. Granger writes Nick a letter that she promises to give to him after their battle concludes. At the end of the year, she compliments Nick on how he handled things and encourages him to continue coming up with big ideas and putting them into action. Ten years later, she sends Nick a copy of the first dictionary to include "frindle" and the letter she wrote. In it, she admits that she chose to play the villain so that Nick would keep fighting, and she says that Nick's invention is proof of how language grows and changes over time.

Bud Lawrence – A local businessman in Westfield. At the age of 19, Bud began buying fast-food restaurants in Westfield and before long became the richest man in town. He's always on the lookout for a new investment, and when he reads the "frindle" article in the paper, he knows it'll be a big money-maker. Bud promptly begins printing "frindle" on pens and selling them, and when CBS airs the "frindle" story on national news, he begins getting orders for shirts and other merchandise. However, when Bud's lawyer points out that they need to buy the rights to use "frindle" from the Allen family, Bud truly shows that he's a shrewd businessman. When he recognizes that the overwhelmed Mr. Allen just wants to make all the attention stop, Bud offers him a deal that will give Nick 30 percent of royalties and make it so the Allen family doesn't have to actively manage anything.

Janet Fisk – One of Nick's classmates. She lives in Nick's neighborhood and, like most of their classmates, thinks that Nick's schemes are amusing. Because of this, she doesn't hold it against him when Mrs. Avery wrongfully accuses her of making the bird noises that Nick is actually responsible for—and she thinks it's so funny, she joins Nick in tormenting their teacher. In fifth grade, Janet helps Nick come up with the idea to rename pens "frindles" when she finds a pen on their walk home one afternoon. She is one of the first of Nick's classmates who embraces the term, emphasizing the power of teamwork.

Mrs. Chatham – The principal of Lincoln Elementary School. She's a tall and broad woman whom Nick notes is as tall as his father, Mr. Allen. Mrs. Chatham only becomes involved in the "frindle" business when she's forced to stay after school one day and help Mrs. Granger manage the 200 students who earned detention by saying the word "frindle." Mrs. Chatham

believes that the students are revolting and refusing to respect authority by using their new word instead of "pen," and more than anything, she's afraid that she and Mrs. Granger will lose their jobs and the school's tax money for letting the story get out. When Nick begins to think of the fight as a chess game, he refers to Mrs. Chatham as Mrs. Granger's queen.

Mrs. Allen – Nick's mother. It's implied that Mrs. Allen is the parent truly responsible for the "homework first" rule, which states that Nick and James must complete their homework before they can play. When Mrs. Chatham visits the Allen family to talk about "frindle" and to try to put a stop to the word, Mrs. Allen is annoyed. She thinks that "frindle" is just a harmless, childlike experiment in language and refuses to force Nick to stop. Mrs. Allen does want to make sure that Nick is being respectful, however.

Mr. Allen – Nick's dad. He owns a hardware store in Westfield, and though he's proud of Nick for inventing a new word, he also wants the madness and attention to stop. Because of this, Mr. Allen is willing to go along with Mrs. Chatham's insistence that Nick needs to stop (he only takes this back when Mrs. Allen makes him) and he's very happy to let local businessman Bud Lawrence handle all of the money—and keep 70 percent of the royalties—from frindle-branded merchandise. With the money, he sets up a secret savings trust for Nick to gain access of when he turns 21.

Judy Morgan – A reporter for *The Westfield Gazette*. She's intrigued when she hears about a revolt going on at Lincoln Elementary and conducts interviews with Mrs. Chatham, Mrs. Granger, and a group of students. Judy is very good at reading people; she perceptively recognizes that while Mrs. Chatham says it's all a silly prank, she's actually very annoyed and upset by all the attention. Though everything Judy writes in her article is true, her writing style is dramatic and sends the entire town into an uproar.

Mrs. Avery – Nick's fourth-grade teacher; he thought she looked like a hawk. Because of this, when Nick learned that some small birds can create high-pitched sounds that confuse birds of prey, he began making those noises during class. Mrs. Avery never figured out who made the noises, though she did wrongfully accuse Janet Fisk at one point. The narrator notes that Mrs. Avery simply learned to tune out the noise.

Miss Deaver – Nick's third grade teacher. She was a first-year teacher when she had Nick as a student, which made her particularly naïve and susceptible to his tricks: over the course of a week, he orchestrated the transformation of the classroom into a tropical paradise. She thought it was wonderful and praised him for his creativity until the administration put a stop to it and scolded her for losing control of her students.

MINOR CHARACTERS

James Allen – Nick's older brother. He's about ten years older

than Nick and is in college for the bulk of the novel. When Nick turns 21 and assumes control of the money from the frindle trust fund, he gives James some of the money to help send his kids to college.

Mrs. Freed – The secretary at Lincoln Elementary. When Mrs. Granger starts keeping hundreds of students after school for detention for using "frindle," Mrs. Freed quickly becomes annoyed and overwhelmed by it all—she spends most of her time fielding calls from annoyed parents and the school superintendent.

Alice Lunderson – A part-time employee at the local CBS station. When she reads Judy Morgan's article about "frindle" in *The Westfield Gazette*, Alice knows it'll be a big story. The story goes on to be Alice's first story to make the national news.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



LANGUAGE

Frindle tells the story of fifth grader Nick Allen, who is described as a boy who isn't a bad kid by any means, just one who has lots of ideas and enjoys putting them to work in ways that annoy his teachers. This leads Nick to begin a contest of wills with his **dictionary**-loving language arts teacher Mrs. Granger by deciding that pens should be known as "frindles," something that the entire school and eventually, the entire United States gets behind—everyone, that is, except for Mrs. Granger. As Nick and Mrs. Granger conduct their battle over the word, they both learn a very important lesson about language and the way that language functions, evolves, and exists in the public mind: essentially, language is a living thing that's constantly being shaped by the people who use it, not something static and unchanging.

Within the first few days of school, Mrs. Granger makes a point to impress upon her students that language is something created by people for their use, not something arbitrary. When Nick asks why words mean what they do, Mrs. Granger explains that words possess particular meanings and connotations because people collectively decide over time that they should meaningfully signal those things. Mrs. Granger's explanation situates language first as something logical. To illustrate the logical nature of language, Mrs. Granger later describes the etymology of the word "pen," noting that it comes from the Latin word for "feather," because feathers were used to make quills, which was the primary writing instrument in ancient times. Though the etymology of the word "pen" does force Mrs.

Granger to admit that language changes over time, she also makes the case that language changes slowly and that words aren't real, per se, until they make it into the dictionary, and in doing so become part of the official law of language. With this disclaimer, she attempts to show Nick that language does have rules—and important ones at that—even if those rules can technically be changed.

The success of the word "frindle," and Mrs. Granger's reticence to embrace the word, shows that she sees changes to the English language as something that happens only in the past, rather than accepting that language continues to change even in the present. It only takes Nick a few weeks to come up with the idea to rename pens frindles, convince his class and then his school to use the word, and attract the attention of national media outlets that spread the word even further afield. Further, as "frindle" becomes more and more accepted, both Mrs. Granger and Nick eventually realize that the future of the world—and indeed, the trajectory of language as a whole—isn't something that they can control. Though it's easy to read Nick's insistences that he can't stop others from using the word as cheekiness calculated to annoy Mrs. Granger, he's also not wrong. "Frindle" takes on a life of its own, and there's nothing Nick or Mr. Granger can do to effectively help or hinder its spread once this happens.

While the initial boom in popularity happens practically overnight, it still takes "frindle" ten years to make it into the dictionary and become an official, widely accepted word to refer to pens. Despite it taking so long, "frindle's" induction into the dictionary reinforces that language is everchanging—and will continue to adapt and grow as people come up with new ways to communicate with each other.



POWER, HIERARCHY, AND RULES

Though Nick insists he never meant to incite a war with his fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Granger, by renaming pens "frindles"—a name that sweeps the school, city, and then entire nation—this is exactly what he ends up doing. As the battle progresses, and as Nick emerges as the leader of the winning side, the novel interrogates the power structures that make Nick's win unlikely in the first place and that, ultimately are in place to discourage him and other likeminded students from challenging the hierarchy and rules of a conventional school setting.

It's important to note that as a successful troublemaker, Nick begins the novel with a nuanced grasp of the power structure that organizes his school. He recognizes that the principal, Mrs. Chatham, is the most powerful individual at Lincoln Elementary, followed by the teachers (with experienced and notorious teachers like Mrs. Granger at the top of an associated but separate hierarchy) and finally, by the students themselves. Nick is able to pull off his pranks by manipulating this system and using it to his advantage. When he convinces

Miss Deaver to turn their third grade classroom into a tropical paradise, he uses her status as an inexperienced first-year teacher to his advantage by preying on her gullibility and sense of wonder at the "creativity" of her students. Because of this, *she* is the one who gets in trouble with the principal for neglecting lesson plans and tracking sand all over the school, as it was her responsibility to control and teach her students. It's implied that Nick, on the other hand, gets away with his mischief—Miss Deaver should never have condoned his so-called creativity after all.

Nick is also known for his ability to distract teachers at the end of class so they won't have the time to assign homework, a method that hinges on the engrained power structures of the school. Nick plays to his teachers' sense of superiority over their students and their joy (and perhaps pride) in having a captive audience to encourage them to talk about themselves or something else important to them. In other words, Nick is able to stroke his teachers' egos and make them feel important, while actually depriving them of their control over their classrooms. Nick's trickery almost always works, suggesting that while teachers may be sources of power and discipline, their power isn't absolute. It's not difficult for a bright, charismatic student to turn that power around and create a situation in which students can enjoy a higher status than the school ever intended them to.

When Nick starts in on the "frindle" war with Mrs. Granger, two things initially stand in his way: first, Mrs. Granger is well aware of Nick's diversion tactics, and second, she casts herself not as a symbol of power, but as a mere enforcer of a power system set out by the education system and the **dictionary** respectively. By positioning herself in this way, Mrs. Granger acts as Nick's adversary, but not in a direct way. She uses her status as a teacher to punish students for using "frindle," but she also insists she's not engaging in this fight to simply suppress the antics of a naughty student. Rather, she wants to make Nick understand the importance of respecting established systems of power, like the dictionary and the formal education system.

Mrs. Granger's letter to Nick—a letter she writes a few weeks into the war but doesn't send to him until "frindle" makes it into the dictionary ten years later—reveals that Mrs. Granger actually supported Nick's new word all along, but chose to continue in her role as Nick's adversary. She did this to ensure that he and other "frindle" proponents had someone to fight against, something she believes was necessary to preserve the momentum and eventually land "frindle" in the dictionary. With this, Mrs. Granger impresses upon Nick that while systems of power have their place, part of respecting those systems actually includes interrogating them, challenging them, and in some cases, changing them. This is why she writes that she asks her students to look up "frindle" on the first day of school—its inclusion in the dictionary shows that it's possible to change the

rules, and that doing so isn't a bad thing at all.



RESPONSIBILITY AND FAME

As the word "frindle" captures the imaginations of Nick's classmates and eventually, the imaginations of others across the nation, Nick finds himself thrust suddenly into the limelight. He finds the attention exciting at first, though it soon becomes difficult to manage the responsibility of having created an entirely new word. As Nick navigates the difficult landscape of being briefly famous, he's forced to decide what he should do with his fame. Ultimately, Nick's decisions suggest that being famous comes with a great deal of responsibility to give back and support one's community so that they too have access to the opportunities that allowed Nick to become famous in the first place.

Though Nick is at first only a local hero among a few of his classmates for standing up to their fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Granger, in the space of a few weeks, Nick is suddenly giving interviews, appearing on television, and unbeknownst to him, earning money for his invention. The narrator notes that Nick has always enjoyed his status as a charismatic troublemaker and he's always gotten attention for it, but the amount of attention he earns for coining "frindle" as the new term for "pen" is something entirely new—and not something he finds easy to deal with. Nick discovers that because of his fame, people expect him to be witty and pushing the envelope all the time, something he finds unsustainable in the long run. This leads Nick to withdraw, become very quiet, and realize that fame comes with consequences. He recognizes, in other words, that his fame flattens him in the eyes of others into someone who is *only* a witty and charming troublemaker, not a complex individual.

This realization that fame can have negative consequences makes Nick question some of the other ideas that he has, most notably his hunch that if he and all his classmates boycott the horrible cafeteria food, they'll be able to negotiate for more appetizing school lunches. Rather than see this as something doable and simple as he once might have, after his experiences promoting "frindle," Nick fears that he'll be punished or accused of stirring up trouble if he were to speak up about the cafeteria food and attract attention once again. This suggests that Nick recognizes that his actions have consequences, and that he needs to accept this if he wishes to organize and push back on established systems of power. However, when Mrs. Granger notices that Nick has become quiet and withdrawn, she counsels him to not let the discomfort he experienced as a result of his fame stop him from coming up with ideas and putting them out there. Essentially, she encourages him to accept the responsibility of his fame and use it for good, rather than letting it hobble him.

Unbeknownst to Nick, his fame affects his family as well, first in a negative way and later, in a positive one. Nick's dad is

completely overwhelmed by his son's sudden and widespread fame, so when the local businessman Bud Lawrence approaches him about buying the rights to "frindle" from Nick, Mr. Allen makes the problem go away as quickly as he can. Mr. Allen sets up a savings trust for Nick and arranges for Bud Lawrence's royalty payments to route directly to the account, rather than go through the family or require constant attention. It's important to note that the fact that Nick earns money from his invented word at all makes it clear that fame can be more than a burden—the account is set up so that, in the future, Nick will be able to reap the rewards of his fame, even if his father is bewildered by it all at first.

When Nick turns 21 and assumes control of the account, however, his uses for the money demonstrate that he recognizes the importance of helping others learn the lessons that, eventually, led to his success. In addition to generously giving money to his family members, Nick sets up a million-dollar scholarship fund in Mrs. Granger's name. In doing so, Nick reinforces the novel's assertions that changing language is a communal effort and should therefore benefit the community, suggesting that fame is best when put to use to enact positive change and to meaningfully help others.



LEADERSHIP AND TEAMWORK

When Nick embarks on his quest to turn the made-up word "frindle" (meaning "pen") into a term accepted by the masses, he recognizes immediately

that he cannot change the English language on his own. In making it clear that Nick is a leader but is, more than anything, a team player, *Frindle* focuses on the value of collective action and suggests that working together towards a common goal is one of the best and most successful ways to enact change.

Even prior to the fifth grade, Nick discovers that his pranks are far more successful when he's able to bring in others to help him. For instance, he skillfully ropes his entire third grade class into making Miss Deaver's room a tropical island, and Janet Fisk is more than willing to help Nick torment Mrs. Avery with high-pitched bird noises in fourth grade.

When it comes to making "frindle" take hold, Nick skillfully uses his charisma to gradually bring in supporters. He begins with a group of six students who all take an oath to only use "frindle" instead of "pen," and eventually expands this to the entire fifth grade class of 150 students. Because the students act collectively, Mrs. Granger's attempts to punish them morph into status symbols or rites of passage rather than remain true punishments. In this way, the students come to think of serving detention with her as a "badge of honor"—rather than signifying that a student misbehaved, serving detention instead connotes that a student is part of a larger movement. In other words, acting together offers Nick's classmates a way to find solidarity and support each other as they fight for their right to use "frindle" rather than "pen." This suggests that one of the

major upsides of working as a team is this sense of camaraderie—which is strong enough to turn something intended to be a punishment into something positive. Nick and his classmates also find that there's safety and power in numbers. Eventually, parents and even the school administrators become annoyed that Mrs. Granger is keeping hundreds of children after school in detention. Soon she's forced to stop giving detention for the use of "frindle" at all, a turn of events that only happened because enough people got upset.

One of the reasons that this prank in particular requires teamwork is because in order to change a word, buy-in from others is necessary. Simply deciding to call pens "frindles" as a solo act wouldn't have done much of anything, as language is something that connects people to each other and is predicated on a shared understanding of what words mean. Nick would've simply been unintelligible to everyone else had he not drawn in others to help him spread the word. This reinforces the communal aspect of language itself, as well as reinforces Nick's understanding of how teamwork and unity can bring about change.

Notably, Nick takes what he learns about the power of community and applies it to other causes in the future. The narrator says that there are many things that Nick was able to change during his time as a student, but it offers only his successful bid to improve Westfield's cafeteria food as an example of what can be achieved through collective action. Though *Frindle* doesn't take the idea any further than that, it's worth noting that Nick is learning a valuable lesson that will continue to benefit him even as he enters adulthood. Teamwork, collective action, and unified protest have brought about all manner of changes throughout history, and have been essential elements of labor, suffrage, and civil rights movements worldwide. With this, *Frindle* becomes more than a lesson in language—Nick's organizing teaches young readers how to be active, engaged, and questioning citizens and makes it clear that when people work together towards a common goal, they'll be able to make real change in their communities.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE DICTIONARY

At the beginning of *Frindle*, and especially in the first few weeks following Nick's invention of the word "frindle" (meaning "pen"), Mrs. Granger is careful to characterize the dictionary as a symbol of rules, regulations, and power. Though she admits it is changeable, she makes it clear to her students that the dictionary represents centuries

of work to craft a language and the rules that guide its use—language is not something that can change overnight. However, when Nick receives Mrs. Granger's letter ten years later and learns that "frindle" made it into the dictionary, he learns that there's actually more to Mrs. Granger's characterization than she let on in fifth grade. She admits that though the dictionary does indeed signify power, history, and rules, it also acts as a symbol for societal, linguistic, and social change as new words are added to describe a constantly changing world.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon and Schuster edition of *Frindle* published in 1996.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☛ For the rest of Nick's fourth-grade year, at least once a week, Mrs. Avery heard a loud "peeeep" from somewhere in her classroom—sometimes it was a high-pitched chirp, and sometimes it was a very high-pitched chirp.

Related Characters: Nick Allen, Janet Fisk, Mrs. Avery

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

When Nick is in fourth grade, he and his classmate Janet begin to torment their teacher by making high-pitched bird noises. Mrs. Avery never figures out where the noises are coming from. Though Nick's plan was successful when he was the only one doing it, it's important for him to learn that his big ideas can be way more successful in practice when he brings in others to help him. This starts to lay the groundwork for his "frindle" idea, which requires even more participation from others than this one did. The success of this prank also shows Nick that he can actually best the power dynamics at play in the formal education system, especially when he asks others to help him.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☛ Don't even think about chewing a piece of gum within fifty feet of her. If you did, Mrs. Granger would see you and catch you and make you stick the gum onto a bright yellow index card. Then, she would safety-pin the card to the front of your shirt and make you wear it for the rest of the school day.

Related Characters: Mrs. Granger

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 7-8

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator explains how Mrs. Granger punishes students when she catches them chewing gum. By using public humiliation to make her point, Mrs. Granger shows that she understands how to use the power of a group to her advantage. Rather than just making a student spit out their gum, she forces them to display to their classmates that they misbehaved—and later, she asks students to have their parents sign the index card and bring it back, humiliating the misbehaving student in front of even more people. By using the power of the group and recognizing that public shaming like this is an effective way to change behavior, Mrs. Granger is able to force kids to comply with the rules and to admit that teachers have far more power than students, especially when she's able to turn the students against the student in question.

☛ But her pride and joy was one of those huge dictionaries with every word in the universe in it, the kind of book it takes two kids to carry. It sat on its own little table at the front of her classroom, sort of like the altar at the front of a church.

Related Characters: Mrs. Granger

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

The narration describing Mrs. Granger makes clear that she's best known for her love of the dictionary. This particular dictionary becomes a symbol of power for Mrs. Granger. As far as she's concerned, it's the law of the land. In particular, likening it to the altar of the church imbues the dictionary with the same kind of reverence and power that a religious person would afford to a crucifix or a bible. Notably, this characterization of the dictionary implies that Mrs. Granger doesn't necessarily believe that words can change, as they're already law and like the old religious laws, don't always change to reflect changes in society. This attitude will change by the end of the story, when she views the dictionary as a living artifact that stays current by

adapting to linguistic developments.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☛☛ Nick was an expert at asking the delaying question—also known as the teacher-stopper, or the guaranteed time-waster. At three minutes before the bell, in that split second between the end of today's class work and the announcement of tomorrow's homework, Nick could launch a question guaranteed to sidetrack the teacher long enough to delay or even wipe out the homework assignment.

Related Characters: Nick Allen, Mrs. Granger

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of seventh period on the first day of school, Nick prepares to stop Mrs. Granger from assigning homework by deploying the "teacher-stopper." The teacher-stopper itself illustrates how Nick is able to manipulate the power structure at school to his advantage and use it to gain power over his teachers. By asking them a question that appeals to their interest, Nick takes advantage of the fact that people generally like to talk about themselves. The class then becomes a captive audience and the teacher who falls for the question gets to feel important and respected as they answer it—while in actuality, Nick is depriving the teacher of their ability to effectively do their job by assigning homework, putting himself above his teacher in the school hierarchy.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☛☛ "But if all of us in this room decided to call that creature something else, and if everyone else did, too, then that's what it would be called, and one day it would be written in the dictionary that way. [We](#) decide what goes in that book." And she pointed at the giant dictionary.

Related Characters: Mrs. Granger (speaker), Nick Allen

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

After Nick asks who decides what words go in the dictionary, Mrs. Granger makes it clear that all English speakers do, and that, over time, they can all work together to change language. Again, Mrs. Granger insists that the dictionary itself is a source of power. She implies that a word isn't necessary real until it ends up there, as its inclusion gives it an air of respectability and authority. Most importantly, however, is her mention that it takes many people working together to imbue a word authority. This introduces Nick to the fact that if he wants to make "frindle" work, he'll need the help of all of his classmates to do so.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☛☛ Then when Nick went to preschool, he learned that if he wanted his teacher and the other kids to understand him, he had to use the word *music*. But *gwagala* meant that nice sound to Nick, because Nick said so. Who says *gwagala* means music? "You do, Nicholas."

Related Characters: Nick Allen, Janet Fisk, Mrs. Granger, Mr. Allen, Mrs. Allen

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 34-35

Explanation and Analysis

On his way home from school, Nick puzzles over what Mrs. Granger said about English speakers being able to change the English language. Here, he remembers that as a toddler, he used a special word he made up to indicate "music"; while his parents could understand him, but nobody else did. After Mrs. Granger's explanation, Nick is able to contextualize this experience and understand that fringe groups all over the world come up with their own systems of communicating with each other—though often, those new words and language patterns don't make it into the mainstream. However, this memory still shows Nick how words can become legitimate and will help inspire his invention of "frindle."

☛☛ Nick didn't say "pen." Instead, he said, "Here's your... frindle."

"Frindle?" Janet took her pen and looked at him like he was nuts. She wrinkled her nose and said, "What's a *frindle*?"

Related Characters: Janet Fisk (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

When Nick hands Janet her dropped pen—which she’s recently found on the sidewalk—he calls the pen a “frindle” without any explanation. Though Nick goes on to pull Janet into his plan to make “frindle” into a real word, her reaction here shows what would happen if Nick tried to act alone. Janet has no idea what Nick is talking about—to her, what he’s saying is nonsense. This drives home the point that language is fundamentally something that ties people together. It’s communal, and one person cannot effectively change a word on their own. Instead, people have to call on other people to also change their language patterns. In doing so, a word becomes normalized and spreads.

☝ And when she asked, the lady reached right for the pens and said, “Blue or black?”

Nick was standing one aisle away at the candy racks, and he was grinning.

Frindle was a real world. It meant *pen*. Who says frindle means pen? “You do, Nicholas.”

Related Characters: Nick Allen, Janet Fisk, Mrs. Granger

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

Nick reflects on how “frindle” has spread as he watches Janet ask a saleslady for one. Janet is the sixth kid to have done so and, as such, the saleslady understands what Janet is asking for. This little experiment shows Nick that what Mrs. Granger said is true: regular people like him are the ones who create language. Notably, this moment echoes Nick’s earlier remembrance of inventing his own word for “music” as a toddler; then, the narrator remarked, “Who says *gwagala* means music? ‘You do, Nicholas.’” In echoing that moment here, the story at once emphasizes the ultimate arbitrariness of language—and, as such, its endless capacity for invention.

The act of trying this new word out with the saleslady also shows that one of the important ways that words catch on and spread is when they’re easy to teach. In this case, the

kids can simply point to the pens and express what they want without ever having to say “pen,” which helps the saleslady learn that “frindle” is a new word for “pen.” In addition, the fact that it takes six kids in order to make this happen reinforces that it takes a group to create this kind of change.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☝ But that just made everyone want to use Nick’s new word even more. Staying after school with The Lone Granger became a badge of honor. There were kids in her classroom every day after school. It went on like that for a couple of weeks.

Related Characters: Nick Allen, Mrs. Granger

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

After Mrs. Granger threatens any kid who uses “frindle” with detention, a lot of kids purposefully use the word and readily accept their punishment. The fact that detention becomes a “badge of honor” for these students illustrates the power of working together as a team. Because the kids are co-conspirators, in a sense, the punishment loses a lot of its power. When comparing this situation to Mrs. Granger’s habit of publically humiliating kids for chewing gum, it becomes clear that the gum punishment only works because Mrs. Granger is able to turn a whole group of children against one errant classmate. With “frindle,” however, the kids choose to stick together, thereby depriving detention of its potency as a humiliating punishment. Instead, detention becomes a way to look like part of the group.

☝ “I don’t think there’s anything wrong with it. It’s just fun, and it really is a real word. It’s not a bad word, just different. And besides, it’s how words really change, isn’t it? That’s what you said.”

Related Characters: Nick Allen (speaker), Mrs. Granger

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

After a few weeks, Mrs. Granger asks Nick to stay after class and chat with her about "frindle." In Nick's response to her suggesting that it's gone far enough, note that he's very careful to credit Mrs. Granger with laying the groundwork for "frindle" in the first place. This allows Nick to show Mrs. Granger that he's not actually trying to be disrespectful to her, he's just testing out what she's taught him to see if it works.

In doing this, Nick also demonstrates the ability to take what he's learned in class and apply it to the real world. It's important to keep in mind that the events in *Frindle* model how organized protest works in politics. The novel introduces readers to these ideas in such a way as to make it clear that school, books, and language are the building blocks of society and, as such, can be used to make changes in that society.

☞ "The word *pen* has a long, rich history. It comes from the Latin word for feather, *pinna*. It started to become our word *pen* because quills made from feathers were some of the first writing tools ever made. It's a word that comes from somewhere. It makes *sense*, Nicholas."

"But *frindle* makes just as much sense to me," said Nick. "And after all, didn't somebody just make up the word *pinna*, too?"

That got a spark from Mrs. Granger's eyes ...

Related Characters: Nick Allen, Mrs. Granger (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 44-45

Explanation and Analysis

In her attempt to get Nick to drop "frindle," Mrs. Granger offers the etymology of the word "pen." Mrs. Granger's main point is that the history of words is fundamentally logical, with a clear progression from its Latin origin. This implicitly argues that words change slowly and that, for the most part, they changed far off in the past (in this case, when people actually spoke Latin). This is an attempt to make Nick believe that language isn't currently changing, something that Mrs. Granger will later admit isn't actually true. In this way, this moment stands as one in which—despite any appearance to the contrary—Mrs. Granger is actually encouraging Nick to question authority; as he astutely replies, someone also must have made up the word "pinna" in the first place. That this response elicits a "spark from Mrs. Granger's eyes" hints at her appreciation of Nick's

insight.

☞ And the next day, all the fifth graders did it again, and so did a lot of other students—over two hundred kids.

Parents called to complain. The school bus drivers threatened to go on strike. And then the school board and the superintendent got involved.

Related Characters: Nick Allen, Mrs. Chatham, Mrs. Granger

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

When Mrs. Granger continues to give Lincoln Elementary students detention for using "frindle," parents, bus drivers, and even the school district administration get involved. Though their involvement has less to do with "frindle" itself and more with the fact that kids staying after school is disruptive, this does illustrate the growing power of the movement Nick started; that frindle has gotten attention beyond the classroom foreshadows its ultimate nationwide popularity. Furthermore, by calling the office and voicing their displeasure, parents and the bus drivers can make it clear to Mrs. Chatham and Mrs. Granger that the teachers are fighting a battle that those outside the school think is silly and is only serving to inconvenience them. Though it doesn't do much at this point in the story, this kind of pressure continues and, later, causes Mrs. Granger to abandon giving detention for the use of "frindle." This illustrates the power of working together.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ Nick shook his head. "I can't, Dad. It won't work. It's a real word now. It used to be just mine, but not anymore."

Related Characters: Nick Allen (speaker), Mrs. Chatham, Mr. Allen

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

After Mrs. Chatham's visit, Mr. Allen tells Nick to just stop his friends from using "frindle." When Nick insists that he

can't do that, he shows that he recognizes that the word has moved beyond him and his immediate circle of influence. At this point, the word is already entering others' vocabularies and is under their control as much as Nick's. This speaks again to the communal nature of language and the fact that, while as an individual Nick could make up a word, it takes large groups of people in order to establish that new word as broadly meaningful. The popularity of "frindle" further suggests that it is indeed well on its way to becoming a real, accepted word.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☛☛ What could she say, though? Mrs. Chatham couldn't very well keep the reporter away from Mrs. Granger because, after all, America is a free country with a free press.

Related Characters: Mrs. Granger, Mrs. Chatham, Judy Morgan

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Chatham agrees to let Judy Morgan speak to Mrs. Granger for her "frindle" article in the local paper, but she does so only grudgingly. By reminding the reader that America has a free press, the novel begins to place its events in the context of the larger history of American politics and protest. In doing this, the novel encourages the reader to understand that while Nick's quest to make "frindle" a word is relatively silly, the process he's going through is the exact same process that someone who wants to change anything else in government or in a school system would go through. What's more, this moment reaffirms the immense power of language itself to inform and, it follows, affect change.

☛☛ A boy who was almost falling over from the weight of his backpack looked up at her and smiled. "It's not so bad. There's always a bunch of my friends there. I've written that sentence six hundred times now."

Related Characters: Nick Allen, Mrs. Granger, Judy Morgan

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

Judy Morgan speaks to several unnamed students on their way out of serving detention with Mrs. Granger. This particular boy gets at the reason why Mrs. Granger's punishment isn't effective as punishment: because so many kids are acting together, Mrs. Granger is no longer able to single individual kids out and make them feel bad for their actions. It's much harder for her to instill the sense of shame when she's keeping 200 students per day; the number of kids means that they find a sense of solidarity with each other, and they're able to encourage each other to continue fighting for their right to use "frindle."

Chapter 11 Quotes

☛☛ Or this bit about Nick: "Everyone agrees that Nick Allen masterminded this plot that cleverly raises issues about free speech and academic rules. He is the boy who invented the new word."

Related Characters: Judy Morgan (speaker), Nick Allen, Mrs. Granger

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator offers some clips from Judy Morgan's article about "frindle." With this snippet, Judy draws a clear connection between Nick's desire to make "frindle" into an accepted word and the real-world connotations of what he's doing. In her mind, Nick isn't just testing how language works; Mrs. Granger's decision to punish kids for using "frindle" turns it into an issue of constitutional rights and free speech. This continues to expand the novel's scope and situate it as a model for how organized protest works in the real world.

The article also begins to elevate Nick and Mrs. Granger to celebrity status. With this, Nick finds that he's the face of a word, despite the fact that it's taken so many other people to make the word catch on. This shows how one person can become the face of a protest like this, even though Nick couldn't have actually done it alone.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☝ He could feel it when someone recognized him, and it made him shy and awkward.

Kids at school started expecting him to be clever and funny all the time, and even for a kid as smart as Nick, that was asking a lot.

Related Characters: Nick Allen

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

As Nick's fame grows, he finds that his classmates and neighbors begin to flatten him into little more than the creator of "frindle," ignoring his complexity as a human being and expecting him constantly to play a certain role. This shows some of the perils of celebrity, or becoming the face of a movement. This moment also impresses upon Nick that he has a great deal of responsibility as a famous person: he both has to uphold his belief in his right to use "frindle," and he also has to maintain this image as an endlessly clever and inventive student if he wants to keep "frindle" in the public eye. While a burden now, Nick's fame—and specifically the money it garners—will ultimately be used for good when Nick establishes a scholarship fund.

☝ "I have always said that the dictionary is the finest tool ever made for educating young minds, and I still say that. Children need to understand that there are rules about words and language, and that those rules have a history that makes sense. And to pretend that a perfectly good English word can be replaced by a silly made-up word just for the fun of it, well, it's not something I was ready to stand by and watch without a fight."

Related Characters: Mrs. Granger (speaker), Nick Allen, Alice Lunderson

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

In her interview with Alice Lunderson, Mrs. Granger insists that students need to learn the history of the English

language. The reader learns soon that while Mrs. Granger does believe in the power of the dictionary to dictate what's right and wrong in terms of language, what she's actually doing here is insisting that children need to learn that words can change. Her comment that "frindle" is a silly and made-up word is true, but by insulting the word, she ensures that the kids will continue to use it to stand up for her. In short, she knows exactly what she's doing here. She's asking students to realize that what they're doing is actually just what she taught them to do: stand up to authority and to experiment with language.

☝ "Well," said Nick, "The funny thing is, even though I invented it, it's not my word anymore. *Frindle* belongs to everyone now, and I guess everyone will figure out what happens together."

Related Characters: Nick Allen (speaker), Mr. Allen, Mrs. Allen, Mrs. Granger, Alice Lunderson

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

When Alice Lunderson interviews the Allen family about "frindle" and asks where the word will go next, Nick admits that he's not sure where it will go. In admitting this, Nick shows the reader that he understands that he's no longer the sole person in control of the fate of the word. Instead, whether or not "frindle" continues is in the hands of all the people who are currently using it or will learn to use it in the future. If it continues to gain traction and enters the general public's vocabulary, "frindle" has the chance of making it into the dictionary. If it doesn't continue to capture imaginations, it'll fall by the wayside. When Nick states that he understands and accepts this, it shows that he's truly learned Mrs. Granger's lesson about language: it's a communal effort and is created by people, who all have the power to legitimize or end the word.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☝ All the kids and even some of the teachers used the new word. At first it was on purpose. Then it became a habit, and by the middle of February, *frindle* was just a word, like *door* or *tree* or *hat*.

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

In the months after Nick gives interviews and becomes famous for "frindle," the word itself becomes decidedly ordinary in Westfield. The trajectory of the word illustrates how new words become part of someone's regular vocabulary: first on purpose and very mindfully, and then, simply as habit. The mere fact that it does enter the normal vocabulary in Westfield also proves that Nick was right: someone *can* just decide to make up a word, promote it, and watch it spread. Mrs. Granger is also right, though: she introduced Nick to the idea of how words become legitimate and enter the dictionary, and what's happening here shows her lessons in action.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☝☝ But then Nick remembered what had happened with frindle. It stopped him cold. He was sure that if all the kids stopped buying lunch, sooner or later someone would figure out that it was all Nick Allen's idea. He would get in trouble. People would write about it in the newspaper. The principal would call his parents—anything could happen.

Related Characters: Nick Allen

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

Immediately after Nick comes up with the idea of boycotting the disgusting cafeteria food in order to get the cooks to make better meals, he remembers the trouble that "frindle" caused and thinks better of putting his idea into action. This shows that after "frindle," Nick learned that his ideas and his actions do have consequences that he'll need to accept if he wants to continue stirring up trouble and changing things. When Nick questions this, it shows that one of the biggest consequences of Nick's fame is that he now can't just put things into action without thinking. Because he recognizes that his actions can actually make things happen, Nick will have to think far more carefully about what he decides to do with his power and accept that he has the responsibility to make good choices and fight for what's right.

Chapter Quotes

☝☝ I see now that this is the kind of chance that a teacher hopes for and dreams about—a chance to see bright young students take an idea they have learned in a boring old classroom and put it to a real test in their own world.

Related Characters: Mrs. Granger (speaker), Nick Allen

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

In Mrs. Granger's letter to Nick, she admits that Nick's decision to turn "frindle" into a real word was actually an example of Nick doing exactly what teachers want their students to do. When Mrs. Granger admits this, it reinforces the novel's position as a model for what organized protest can look like. Notably, it also suggests that learning to protest and fight for things begins in the classroom. This suggests that when Nick chose to take on the school system and question the power of Mrs. Granger and the administration, he was actually exercising his rights in a way that will go on to serve him in the future. For Mrs. Granger, this confirms that she's doing her job as a teacher: she's teaching students to be engaged and active citizens, and her lessons are laying the groundwork for them to learn how to effectively protest and enact change in their communities on a much larger scale.

☝☝ So many things have gone out of date. But after all these years, words are still important. Words are still needed by everyone. Words are used to think with, to write with, to dream with, to hope and pray with. And that is why I love the dictionary. It endures. It works. And as you now know, it also changes and grows.

Related Characters: Mrs. Granger (speaker), Nick Allen

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

In closing her letter to Nick, Mrs. Granger insists that the dictionary is important specifically because it *does* change and adapt with the times, though it also serves as a mark of where a society has come from. She also makes it clear that

language is something communal: people write, dream, and think with their words, all activities that tie people to each other and allows them to communicate. Importantly, she reminds Nick that this change is a good thing, as it allows the dictionary to reflect the world as it is, not just as it once was. When Nick made up the word "frindle," the world was a

very different place than it is at this point in the present, ten years later, when "frindle" is an acceptable way to refer to a pen. This shows Mrs. Granger modifying her own understanding of the dictionary to one that accepts its ability to change—and conceptualizes that ability as something necessary in order for it to stay relevant.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: NICK

At Lincoln Elementary School, Nick Allen is a kid in a category all to himself—he's not an exclusively good kid, bad kid, or smart kid. Instead, he just has a lot of ideas and knows what to do with them all. In third grade, for instance, he turned Miss Deaver's room into a tropical island. He first encouraged his classmates to make palm trees out of construction paper, then coordinated a dress-up day in which the kids all wore tropical outfits. Miss Deaver thought all of this was fantastic. Then, Nick turned up the thermostat, sprinkled sand on the floor, and the kids kicked off their shoes. The principal found Miss Deaver teaching kids to hula while others played volleyball.

A year later, Nick learned that red wing blackbirds make high-pitched noises that confuse birds of prey. The next day, he noticed that his teacher, Mrs. Avery, had a hooked and beak-like nose like a hawk. He began imitating the blackbird noise but Mrs. Avery couldn't identify which student was doing it. She wrongfully accused Janet Fisk but apologized when she realized she'd made a mistake. Nick apologized to Janet at lunchtime and told her about the blackbird noises, which she found very interesting. For the rest of the school year, both she and Nick made the noises at least once per week. Mrs. Avery never figured out who did it.

These early accounts of Nick's escapades show that he begins the novel with a firm grasp of how to manipulate the power structure at school and how to bring others in to help him. Here, he uses Miss Deaver's status as a first-year teacher to trick her into giving her students way more power than the school wants them to have, and he doesn't do it alone. By working as a group, the kids escape getting in trouble for this, since Miss Deaver should've stopped them to begin with.



In this case, though Nick could have gone on acting alone to torment Mrs. Avery, his prank was far more successful when he allowed Janet to help him. By tricking Mrs. Avery like this, Nick again subverts the power structure and subtly shows Mrs. Avery that despite her status as a teacher, the students are still capable of making her life miserable and evading punishment as well.



CHAPTER 2: MRS. GRANGER

Fifth grade is the year in which students begin to grow up. They no longer get recess in the morning and they have to actually pass their classes. They also get Mrs. Granger, the only language arts teacher at Lincoln Elementary. She's an older lady who has a perfect attendance record, white hair, and exactly two skirt suits. Despite being short, she seems like a giant: she has dark gray eyes that she can "turn on" and make students feel small. Supposedly she also can tell good jokes, but she's not famous for those.

The students believe that Mrs. Granger has X-ray vision, as she seems to know immediately whenever someone is chewing gum. If she catches a student with gum, she makes them spit it out onto an index card, safety pins the card to the victim's shirt, and makes them bring the card back to school the next day signed by a parent.

The description of Mrs. Granger suggests that she's in a class by herself as a teacher and possibly cannot be manipulated like Mrs. Avery and Miss Deaver were. This indicates that teachers have their own hierarchy within the public school system, and teachers like Mrs. Granger have far more power than Mrs. Avery and Miss Deaver.



The punishment for chewing gum suggests that like Nick, Mrs. Granger recognizes the power of a group: in this case, she uses the public humiliation of the index card to shame children into not chewing gum.



Though all of this makes Mrs. Granger terrifying, she's known best for her homework and her love of the **dictionary**. She's known for assigning weekly vocabulary lists that include 35 words, as well as a "Word for the Day" every morning. Mrs. Granger seems to know when students don't write those down and look up the definitions, as she then assigns the students in question two words of the day. She keeps a full set of dictionaries in her classroom as well as one absurdly heavy dictionary that sits on its own table. All of her former students remember her telling them to look things up.

In August, before fifth grade begins, Nick's parents get a letter from Mrs. Granger. It reads that every student is expected to have access to one of her preferred **dictionaries** at home, so that they can expand their vocabularies and properly complete their homework. Nick's mom, Mrs. Allen, thinks it's great that Mrs. Granger takes her job so seriously, but Nick just groans. He likes words and likes to read, but he prefers to ask Mr. Allen or his brother James for a word's definition if he doesn't know it. He's heard that Mrs. Granger won't stand for this, and with a sense of dread, he remembers seeing fifth graders studying hard with their dictionaries last year.

CHAPTER 3: THE QUESTION

The first six periods of Nick's first day of fifth grade go by smoothly. He meets his teachers and chats with his friends. When he gets to Mrs. Granger's seventh period language arts class, however, the teacher is all business. She gives them a vocabulary pretest, makes them review their cursive writing skills, and shows the students how she expects them to format their assignments. Near the end of the period, Nick prepares to ask the "teacher-stopper," a question designed to distract teachers long enough to keep them from assigning homework. He's an expert at this and works hard to choose questions that play to his teachers' interests.

Nick raises his hand and asks Mrs. Granger where all the words in the **dictionaries** come from. His classmates smile; they know what he's doing. Mrs. Granger seems to know too. She asks the class if they're curious about the answer—they are—and then asks Nick to do some research and prepare an oral presentation on the subject for the next class. She smiles and then assigns homework. Nick feels small and beaten. He thinks that everything he's heard about "The Lone Granger" is true.

Mrs. Granger's affinity for the dictionary is understandable given that she teaches language arts, but it's also worth keeping in mind that having a firm grasp of a language allows someone to more fully and more easily participate in society as an adult. This begins to show that what Mrs. Granger is teaching is actually applicable in the outside world, not just in a classroom setting.



Nick's preference for asking people he knows when he doesn't know something suggests that he already believes in a more communal approach to language, rather than simply going to the dictionary as the final and official word on the matter. This sets up the conflict between the two with Nick supporting communal action and Mrs. Granger supporting deference to established systems of power.



The nature of the teacher-stopper shows again that Nick has a nuanced understanding of how to manipulate the school system's hierarchy: by asking a teacher a question that prompts them to talk about their interests, a teacher may feel more powerful and respected. In actuality, however, the question deprives teachers of their power to actually teach and control the students, as it keeps them from performing essential duties of their jobs (i.e. assigning homework).



When Nick's classmates know what he's doing, it suggests that they're already acting as a team to thwart Mrs. Granger and get out of homework. Mrs. Granger's ability to once again use the unity of the group to turn things around and make Nick accept her power shows that Nick is going to have to work much harder if he wants to best Mrs. Granger.



CHAPTER 4: WORD DETECTIVE

As Nick stares down his report and the list of 35 vocabulary words that Mrs. Granger assigned, he pouts about having to do homework on such a beautiful day. Mr. Allen and Mrs. Allen insist that their children complete their homework first thing after school. They were thrilled when their oldest son James wrote home from college and thanked them for this rule, saying that because they taught him to put homework first, his grades were impeccable. The rule has never bothered Nick in the past, as he hasn't had much homework. Now, however, he recognizes that those idyllic days are over.

Nick begins by looking up the vocabulary words in the **dictionary**, which takes him an hour. He can hear a baseball game outside, but he knows he has to finish his report first. Nick finds an introduction in the front of his dictionary called "Words and their Origins." He's thrilled to have found an easy source for his report, but he soon finds that the article is unintelligible.

Nick heads downstairs to the family room, finds the set of children's encyclopedias, and looks up "**dictionary**." He reads the entry in the adult encyclopedia as well, though he only understands about half of what he reads. Nick groans, thinking that it'll be impossible to come up with three minutes' worth of material. Then, he has one of his ideas and decides to make the report fun.

CHAPTER 5: THE REPORT

Nick has a pit in his stomach by lunch the next day. He knows he'll have to stand up in front of Mrs. Granger, and he knows she'll have her eyes turned up all the way. Nick anxiously reads over his notes and wonders if his grand plan is actually all that great. Seventh period comes way too fast. Mrs. Granger invites Nick to the front of the room immediately and takes a seat on a stool, while Nick stands next to the giant **dictionary**. Nick begins his presentation, but Mrs. Granger interrupts him to ask for a title. He looks her in the eye and makes one up on the spot.

Nick talks about Samuel Johnson, who created the first modern English **dictionary** in the 1700s. Kids are in awe when Nick says that his dictionary had more than 43,000 words in it. Nick expects Mrs. Granger to look disapproving, but she looks almost friendly and encourages him on. Nick goes on for twelve minutes and Mrs. Granger laps it all up. When Nick notices Mrs. Granger looking at her watch after eighteen minutes, Nick moves on to phase two.

The realization that because Nick is growing up, he's going to have to follow new rules suggests that as Nick moves towards maturity, the power structures around him are going to change and he'll have to renegotiate where he stands. This mirrors what's going on in Mrs. Granger's class as well, as fifth grade is looking to be the year that Nick will learn that he can't just thwart power systems willy-nilly.



Were Mrs. Granger around, she'd likely say that Nick's inability to understand the introduction is the entire reason she assigns vocabulary words in the first place. This continues to show that Mrs. Granger is teaching kids tools they can use to understand their world, not just giving them arbitrary assignments.



Note that though Nick doesn't understand what he reads, he still apparently knows enough to presumably thwart Mrs. Granger. This shows that even if Nick isn't able to fully understand the encyclopedia entries, he's able to think outside the box and use what he does understand to his advantage.



By placing Nick in proximity to the massive dictionary and moving Mrs. Granger away from it, the novel shows that for the duration of Nick's presentation, he's in control. Remember that at this point the dictionary is a symbol for power and rules, so by being closer to it, Nick is the one who gets to borrow power from the dictionary.



The fact that Nick can go on for eighteen minutes calls into question whether or not he actually understands all of what he's talking about, but it does show how he's figured out how to turn the power structure upside down. While Mrs. Granger thinks at first that he's following instructions, he's actually just wasting time.



Nick pulls his homework **dictionary** out of his bag and explains that there's a lot of information in the front of it about how dictionaries are made. Mrs. Granger interrupts and insists that the class can read it at home, but when several kids protest that they have a different edition, Mrs. Granger allows Nick to read from the dictionary. The students do their best to look fascinated even though they don't actually care about the report—they all know that this report is a stellar diversion. Mrs. Granger also seems aware of this and her eyes seem to burn holes in Nick and the chalkboard, but she allows him to read until there are only ten minutes left in the period.

Finally, Mrs. Granger cuts Nick off. She compliments him on his report and says that the information will mean more to him since he researched it himself. Nick sinks in his chair, thinking that Mrs. Granger is treating him like the teacher's pet and putting his reputation in danger. He raises his hand and insists he still doesn't understand why words mean different things, and who decides what words mean. Mrs. Granger explains that Nick and everyone else who speaks English decides what words mean. She says that if everyone decided to use a different word for something, that new word would one day end up in the **dictionary**.

With a smile, Mrs. Granger says that despite the fact that language can change, the **dictionary** is the law and words only get in for good reasons. She looks at the clock and with eight minutes left in the period, she squeezes in an entire day's worth of work. Nick doesn't try to stop her.

CHAPTER 6: THE BIG IDEA

Later that afternoon, Nick and Janet walk home together. They walk one after the other on the edge of the curb, trying to see who can balance without falling. At one point, Janet steps off the curb—she found a fancy gold ballpoint pen. As the two continue along the curb, Nick thinks about his report and what Mrs. Granger said about words.

Nick thinks of Mrs. Granger saying that *he* says that words mean what they do. He remembers that as a toddler, he had a cassette player and sing-along tapes. When he wanted to listen to the tapes, Nick would carry the player and the tapes to someone, bang them together, and say, "gwagala." His family knew what he wanted when he said "gwagala," though he learned in preschool that for others to understand him, he needed to say "music."

Remember that Nick could hardly understand the introduction when he tried to read it at home. It's likely that that hasn't changed, which reinforces that this is just a way for him to gain power over Mrs. Granger by pretending to be more of an expert than he actually is. When the rest of the class feigns interest, it again shows that they understand that their participation in Nick's diversion is absolutely necessary for this to work.



Mrs. Granger introduces the idea that language is something communal and fundamentally democratic, not just an arbitrary system passed down for generations. This casts language as something that's alive and constantly changing as people come up with new ways to communicate with each other. Notably, however, she still recognizes that there is a power structure: in order for a word to be real, it has to make it into the dictionary.



By insisting that the dictionary is the law, Mrs. Granger actually shows that she does believe that laws are a communal effort—that is, after all, how a word becomes popular enough to get into the dictionary.



It's telling that Nick is doing this thinking in Janet's presence. It sets up the precedent that Nick doesn't and cannot act alone; he needs his friends and classmates to help make his ideas realities.



Nick's assessment of his unique toddler language highlights the ways in which small groups of people develop their own unique ways of speaking to each other that only they understand. By connecting this to Mrs. Granger's explanation of how the dictionary works, this suggests that Nick recognizes that these unique language systems can become mainstream, but often don't.



Absorbed in his thoughts, Nick bumps into Janet, knocking her off the curb and sending the gold pen flying. Nick apologizes, picks up the pen, and hands it to Janet. As he does, he calls it a frindle. Janet gives Nick a funny look, but Nick runs off and won't explain what a frindle is. By the time he makes it home, Nick has a whole plan worked out.

The next afternoon, Nick walks into a corner store and asks the lady behind the counter for a frindle. It takes a minute and Nick has to point to the pens, but the lady finally sells Nick a pen. Every day for the next six days, one of Nick's friends goes in after school and asks the lady for a frindle. By the time Janet asks for a frindle on the sixth day, the lady knows exactly what she's talking about. Nick thinks that "frindle" is now a real word. A bit later, Nick and five of his friends meet in his play room and sign an oath to only use the word "frindle" and never again use the word "pen."

CHAPTER 7: WORD WARS

The next day, right as the bell starting seventh period rings, Nick raises his hand and informs Mrs. Granger that he forgot his frindle. One of Nick's friends makes a big show of digging a pen out of his backpack, tossing it to Nick, and Nick continues the charade. The other kids laugh at the funny new word while Mrs. Granger glares at the class. After class, Mrs. Granger asks Nick to stay for a moment and chat. She tells him not to interrupt her class with his funny idea and Nick tries to look as innocent as possible.

Mrs. Granger holds up her favorite maroon pen and explains that she's talking about pens. Nick makes sure his eyes are wide and blank as he insists that he honestly did forget his frindle. Mrs. Granger purses her lips and releases Nick. As he races out of the room, he promises to never forget his frindle again.

CHAPTER 8: MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

Class pictures are two days later. The fifth grade class gets their picture taken last, which gives Nick and his friends time to whisper something to all of their classmates. After the photographer arranges the class and tells them to say cheese, every kid says "frindle!" and holds up a pen. It's the only photo the photographer can take of the class, as he's out of film for his camera. Mrs. Granger is furious.

This is the first appearance of "frindle" in the story; coming directly on the heels of Nick's remembrance of his toddler language, it's valid to assume that he's made up a new word to mean "pen"—as will soon be clear, this is exactly what he's done.



This small experiment with the word illustrates how new words can enter the mainstream and become accepted. It takes constant use and repetition, and Nick has to draw in people he doesn't know and get them to use the word. This shows that while Nick is the leader of this crusade, there's only so much he can do alone. The success of "frindle" rests on people like this saleslady understanding what it means and using it.



Again, Nick is the ringleader here, but his friend is an essential player in introducing "frindle" to their classmates and Mrs. Granger. It's telling too that "frindle" elicits laughs. As a funny word, it's far more likely to capture the imaginations of a class of ten-year-olds and spread. Mrs. Granger's displeasure suggests she knows this and sees this as a dangerous thing.



Standing up to Mrs. Granger like this shows that Nick recognizes that "frindle" gives him a lot of power. It's not a bad word, which means that there's no real reason why he can't use it in a school setting.



"Ruining" the class photo like this is another way that Nick demonstrates his understanding of the power of working together. It's impossible for the teachers to single out one kid, which means that Nick's entire class is safe from punishment and more powerful than their teachers.



This gets everyone at Lincoln Elementary using Nick's new word, which they all like a lot. The day after the school photo, Mrs. Granger posts a notice on the bulletin board saying that any student who uses "frindle" instead of "pen" will stay after school and write lines. This makes all the students just want to use the word more, and serving detention with Mrs. Granger becomes a badge of honor. She has kids serving detention with her for weeks.

Finally, at the end of seventh period one day, Mrs. Granger asks Nick to talk for a moment. Nick feels like a general participating in a war conference. Mrs. Granger asks Nick if he thinks the "frindle" thing has gone far enough, but Nick insists that "frindle" isn't a bad word and he's just putting Mrs. Granger's lessons about how words change into practice. Mrs. Granger sighs and admits that Nick is correct, but she says that "pen" already has a rich history and makes sense.

Nick innocently says that "frindle" makes sense too and points out that someone probably made up "pinna," that Latin root word for "pen," out of the blue as well. He explains that he and some friends took an oath to only use "frindle," and says again that there's nothing wrong with the word. Mrs. Granger seems unsurprised by Nick's answer. She pulls an envelope out of her desk and explains that it contains a letter she wrote to Nick, and he won't get it until this whole thing is over. She asks him to sign and date the back, so he'll know that she hasn't changed anything when he does receive the letter. Nick realizes that Mrs. Granger is enjoying the war and wants to win.

The next day, one of Nick's friends suggests that they get every fifth grader to ask Mrs. Granger directly for a frindle. Nick reasons that it's a great idea, since she can't possibly keep every student after school. Mrs. Granger keeps 80 students that day, and Mrs. Chatham has to stay to help manage all the students. The fifth graders do it again the next day, along with some younger students. Over 200 kids stay after school. Parents complain, the school board and superintendent get involved, and Mrs. Chatham visits Nick, Mr. Allen, and Mrs. Allen.

Detention can only become a badge of honor because so many kids participate in it. This shows that group action like this has the potential to deprive punishments of their power and, instead, make people even more excited to participate in whatever they're being punished for.



Nick understands that he's doing exactly what he's supposed to be doing as a student by applying what he's learning in the classroom to the real world. The fact that Mrs. Granger does admit that this is true suggests that she may be more sympathetic to Nick's cause than she lets on.



Keep in mind that while Nick doesn't know it, Mrs. Granger is choosing to fight Nick over "frindle." She does this because she recognizes that Nick enjoys pushing back on systems of power. If she were to give in, there would be nothing for Nick to push against and he might lose interest. Therefore, it's necessary for her to take this stand and make Nick feel as though there's an actual fight going on.



When the complaints of parents and the administration results in Mrs. Chatham deciding to do something about "frindle," it again shows that there's power in working together as a group to force change. Notice that Mrs. Granger has no qualms about keeping so many students and punishing them; by doing this, she allows them to also feel a sense of camaraderie.



CHAPTER 9: CHESS

When Mrs. Chatham calls Mr. Allen and Mrs. Allen on October first to set up the meeting, she asks that Nick be there as well. Nick answers the door when she arrives that evening and greets her brightly. Mrs. Chatham doesn't smile back. He leads her to the living room and they all settle in. Mrs. Chatham tells her version of events: Nick encouraged other kids to use "frindle," Mrs. Granger forbade it, the word ruined the class photo, and now, everyone feels that kids aren't respecting rules anymore.

Mr. Allen looks embarrassed, but Nick thinks Mrs. Allen looks annoyed. When Mrs. Chatham is finished, Mrs. Allen says that it all sounds pretty silly. She suggests that there's no harm in kids making up a funny word and using it. Nick is ecstatic that his mom is annoyed with Mrs. Granger, not with him, but Mrs. Chatham says that it's a matter of standards. She explains that it's the same reason why they don't allow the children to use "ain't," and the true issue is that the kids aren't respecting authority.

Mr. Allen expresses agreement with Mrs. Chatham's reasoning, but Nick speaks up and notes that even "ain't" is in the **dictionary**; if a word is in the dictionary, he says, he should be able to use it. This stumps the adults. Mrs. Chatham tries to backpedal, but Mrs. Allen insists that Mrs. Granger is overreacting to a "harmless little experiment with language." She asks Mr. Allen if he agrees in a tone that makes it clear she expects him to agree. He stares off into the distance.

Nick begins to think of the whole thing as a chess game. Mrs. Chatham is Mrs. Granger's queen, while Mrs. Allen is Nick's queen. Nick knows that the war will go on until there's a clear winner. The adults discuss children's right to explore and experiment but, finally, Mrs. Chatham leaves.

Mr. Allen and Mrs. Allen talk to Nick after Mrs. Chatham leaves. Nick explains that he didn't intend to be disrespectful, but all the kids like to use his word and Mrs. Granger made it even more fun to use by punishing them for saying it. Mr. Allen asks Nick to tell his classmates to stop using it, but Nick insists he can't. He says it's no longer just his word since everyone else likes it so much.

Mrs. Chatham's sense that there's a revolt underfoot betrays how precarious the organized education system's power can be, since a bunch of fifth graders and a funny word are making her feel threatened. By insisting that Nick started things, Mrs. Chatham also attempts to play down the role of the group and single out Nick as an easy target for punishment.



Mrs. Chatham's reasoning shows that her true objective is to teach students to obey organized systems of power, whether that be the formal education system that gives teachers control over their students or racial and class systems that associate "ain't" with poverty (as in Charles Dickens' novels) or dialects spoken by African-Americans.



It's important to note that plenty of people do use "ain't"; it's simply not a word that's considered proper. The racial and class connotations of "ain't" aside, this does show Nick that plenty of words his teachers don't want him to use are in the dictionary. If the dictionary confers a sense of linguistic authority, then "frindle" can be a real word as well if it gets in.



The discussion of whether kids have the right to explore begins to expand Frindle's scope and bring in the idea that what Nick is doing isn't just about school; it's about what his rights are as an American citizen.



Nick's comment that "frindle" isn't only his word anymore speaks to the communal nature of language: now that it's become part of Lincoln Elementary students' vocabulary, it's no longer something that a single person—not Nick nor Mrs. Granger—can control or stop.



CHAPTER 10: FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Westfield is a very quiet town with little to report on in its weekly paper, *The Westfield Gazette*. However, when the reporter Judy Morgan hears from a coworker that the kids at Lincoln Elementary are revolting and using some sort of code word, she decides to visit the school and see what's going on. The day after Mrs. Chatham's visit to Mr. and Mrs. Allen, she reports to the office at Lincoln Elementary. She takes a photo of Mrs. Granger's notice about punishing students who use the word "frindle" right outside the office.

Judy introduces herself to the secretary, Mrs. Freed, and says she'd like to speak to someone about the "frindle" business. Mrs. Freed frowns immediately; she's been fielding calls from angry parents and the school board all week and she's tired of it. However, she shows Judy to Mrs. Chatham's office. Judy realizes immediately that Mrs. Chatham is very uncomfortable talking about the issue. She laughs, tries to play it off as a silly prank, and tells Judy that Mrs. Granger overreacted; the kids are just having fun.

Then, Judy asks if she can speak to Mrs. Granger. Mrs. Chatham gives her permission to do so, though Judy knows that if Mrs. Chatham thought she could keep her from speaking to Mrs. Granger, she would; unfortunately for Mrs. Chatham, the United States has a free press. Mrs. Granger steps into the hallway to speak to Judy. When Judy asks how the battle is going over the word, Mrs. Granger insists that it's not truly a battle; she just thinks there's no reason to invent a word for something when there's already a perfectly good word in use. She insists that the word will fall out of favor in due course, though she does tell Judy that a student named Nicholas Allen started the whole thing.

After the interview, Judy takes a few minutes to look over her notes. On her way to the parking lot, she runs into a group of kids who have just finished writing their sentences for Mrs. Granger. Judy asks the kids why they insist on using "frindle," even when it means staying after school. The kids explain it's not so bad because their friends are there, and one says that Mrs. Granger doesn't even bother to look at their papers anymore: they're supposed to write, "I am writing this punishment with a pen," but most of them now substitute "frindle" for "pen" every few sentences. Judy asks if there's any possibility of speaking to Nick Allen, and one boy says Nick doesn't want to say anything wrong and get in trouble.

By bringing in Judy Morgan and media attention, Frindle continues to expand its scope outside of a school setting. Media attention is often what thrusts protests or demonstrations into the public eye and allows them to spread to other parts of the country or world, so by writing a piece on "frindle," Judy is turning the conflict into a much larger issue.



Mrs. Chatham's discomfort suggests that she finds this whole thing unsettling and fears that Nick may actually be able to get the better of the powers that be, especially now that he's attracting media attention. As Judy conducts her interviews, she also raises the public profiles of all of the players, which begins the process of turning Nick into a celebrity for more than just his classmates.



When the novel notes specifically that the United States has a free press and therefore, Judy has the right to speak to Mrs. Granger and tell her story, it continues its project of drawing parallels between this conflict and how protest works in the real world. It shows that a free press, which is guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution, is an essential factor in facilitating the spread of these stories and the ideas they talk about.



The kids' reasoning for staying after again shows the power and the safety of working in a group. Remember, however, that Mrs. Granger has already decided that she supports "frindle" and is just choosing to play the part of the bad guy; this is likely why she allows the kids to substitute "frindle" for "pen" in the punishment lines, as she recognizes that doing so makes the kids feel as though their rebellion is progressing successfully.



The next morning, Judy receives an envelope with "Frindle Story" written on the front. There's no return address and inside is the fifth grade class picture. She notices that all the kids are holding pens. Someone wrote on the back which kid is Nick. Judy recognizes him as the boy who spoke to her in the parking lot.

The class photo becomes a symbol of the rebellion, especially since it makes it into the hands of the press so sneakily. This will allow readers to put faces with names and will heighten Nick and Mrs. Granger's celebrity.



CHAPTER 11: EXTRA! EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT!

That Thursday, the "frindle" story makes the front page of *The Westfield Gazette*. Everything that Judy has written is true, and the way she writes about the conflict fires up the entire town. She writes that Nick is raising issues of free speech and academic rules, while Mrs. Granger is the champion of order and authority. The class photo accompanies the article, with a caption identifying both Nick and Mrs. Granger. Mrs. Allen is angry, as she believes Nick spoke to Judy without permission; the school superintendent is upset with Mrs. Chatham for putting the school's tax funding at risk; and Mrs. Chatham is upset with Mrs. Granger, as she believes her interview will get everyone fired. Nobody knows how Judy got the class photo.

Again, the choices that Judy makes to describe the conflict make it clear that this is an example of constitutionally-protected protest in action, not just a silly thing that kids are doing. She also continues to align Mrs. Granger with the dictionary and how Mrs. Granger conceptualizes the dictionary as the law of language. Further, despite the novel's insistence that America's free press is a good thing in terms of advancing change, the negative reactions show that change doesn't come without growing pains.



CHAPTER 12: AIRWAVES

By the following Thursday, the kids at the Westfield high school and middle school have all started using "frindle." Nick becomes a hero overnight but soon discovers that fame comes at a price. He can no longer walk around and not be recognized, and this makes him feel shy and awkward. At school, Nick's classmates seem to expect him to be funny all the time. Nick knows this is impossible, and he feels as though everyone is watching him. Fortunately, Mrs. Allen and Mr. Allen support Nick and believe he did nothing wrong. They also think it's amazing that their son invented a new word.

Here, Nick learns that there are consequences for being the face of change: he now has the responsibility of looking like a person who creates new words and incites rebellion, when that's only who he is some of the time. This seeks to impress upon readers that people who are the face of change are just people, with private and complex thoughts, feelings, and fears, and should be treated as such.



Bud Lawrence, one of Westfield's most successful businessmen, also thinks that the new word is fantastic. He began his career in business 30 years ago when he started buying fast-food restaurants and now he's one of the richest men in town. When he read the article in *The Westfield Gazette*, he filed a preliminary trademark claim on "frindle" and began selling pens with "frindle" printed on them. Bud sold out of pens in the first week, but the fervor died down around Halloween and he moved on to other projects.

Bud's ability to capitalize on "frindle" and make money off of the word expands the novel's scope once again. It first points to the ways in which protests like this do often require money, and in doing so, it offers another way for the "frindle" mania to spread through merchandise. It also points to the way that capitalism may exploit protest in the name of profit.



However, Alice Lunderson, a part-time employee at the local CBS station, reads the article in *The Westfield Gazette* on the following Wednesday as she pores over local papers. She knows the story has potential, so she calls her manager. Her manager sends the story all the way to New York, and the CBS evening news decides that it will be a fantastic closing segment for the following evening. Alice is thrilled; it'll be her first assignment to make the national news.

On Wednesday afternoon, Alice interviews Mrs. Granger. Mrs. Granger insists that the **dictionary** is a fine tool for educating youngsters and says that kids need to learn that words and language have rules and histories that make sense. When Alice asks if Mrs. Granger has lost the fight against "frindle," Mrs. Granger simply says that it's not over yet.

When Alice and her crew arrive at the Allens' house, Mr. Allen and Mrs. Allen are ready. They squish Nick on the couch between them and Mrs. Allen puts her foot on top of Nick's. They decided that she'd push on his foot if she felt she needed to answer any questions for him. Nervously, Nick tells Alice how he made up "frindle": Mrs. Granger told him that all words are made up by people, and he wanted to see if it was true that someone could make up a word and make it mean something.

Mrs. Allen steps on Nick's foot when Alice asks if Nick was surprised when Mrs. Granger reacted with anger to the new word. Mrs. Allen says that it did create a disruption, but Mrs. Granger is a fine teacher. Nick says that without Mrs. Granger, he wouldn't have learned so much about words. Alice asks Nick what's next for him and for "frindle," and Nick says that the word isn't his anymore. All the people who use the word will decide what will happen with it.

The next evening, the CBS anchorman introduces the segment by saying that in 1791, a theater manager created the word "quiz" out of thin air. Over 20 million people see the segment, including the producer of *The Late Show with David Letterman* and a staff writer for *People*. Over the next three weeks, nearly everyone in the U.S. hears about "frindle" and kids start using it en masse. Bud is elated when he begins getting orders for frindle-branded items.

Through all of this, it's important to keep in mind that the media are giving "frindle" the opportunity to enter into the vocabularies of hundreds of people. This illustrates how the media landscape can both help change language by promoting new words, as well as how individuals like Nick can achieve celebrity thanks to media attention.



Mrs. Granger's comment about kids needing to learn the history of language shows that she's pretending to believe that language only changed in the past and isn't continuing to change in the present.



Notice that the way that Nick frames the birth of "frindle" expresses a great deal of respect and deference for Mrs. Granger. This shows that even though he believes that her fight is genuine, he recognizes that he could've only come up with "frindle" thanks to her teaching. In doing this, Nick acknowledges Mrs. Granger's power as a teacher.



Again, both Nick and Mrs. Allen understand that in order to keep this interview free of controversy, they need to be deferential and thankful to Mrs. Granger's lessons. This re-centers the conflict as one that's about language and how words change, not as a conflict between rebellious students and uptight teachers.



The fact that kids around the country start using "frindle" after seeing the segments and interviews on TV cements the role of the media in changing language, as it's clearly one of the best ways for a new word to spread. Note too that Nick is becoming famous on a much larger scale; this implies that even more people now expect him to be nothing more than the creator of "frindle."



Bud's lawyer, however, tells Bud that there will be complications since Nick Allen actually made up the word and everyone in the country knows it. The lawyer tells Bud to make a deal with Mr. Allen to buy the rights to the word. When Mrs. Allen tells her husband the next day that he needs to call Bud Lawrence about the "frindle" thing, Mr. Allen is unenthused. He's tired of all the fuss and of being pulled away from his hardware store, but he stops in at Bud's office anyway.

Bud compliments Mr. Allen on Nick's ingenuity and sees his opportunity when Mr. Allen admits that he's ready for the fuss to die down. Bud begins telling Mr. Allen about all the orders he has for frindle-branded pens and tee shirts and says he even has a deal in the works with pen producers in Hong Kong and Japan. Mr. Allen sinks lower in his chair. Bud explains that he needs Mr. Allen's permission to use "frindle" on these products. He points to a big stack of papers and explains that it's a contract giving Nick 30 percent of all profits from any frindle-branded things. If he signs, Mr. Allen won't have to do a thing.

Mr. Allen barely has to think about it before he signs the contract and the trademark papers. Before he leaves, Bud hands Mr. Allen a check for \$2,250—Nick's cut of the proceeds from "frindle" sales in the first three weeks. Mr. Allen is shocked and asks Bud to keep the money thing secret from Nick, as he wants Nick to learn how to save on his own. Bud agrees. After Mr. Allen leaves, he walks to the bank and sets up a trust account for Nick. He sets up all of Bud's payments to deposit automatically into the account and wonders if things will ever be the same again.

CHAPTER 13: RIPPLES

Within a few weeks, things do return to normal in Westfield, though "frindle" persists. Most kids and even some teachers use it, and most Westfield residents barely notice that it's anything different. In the rest of the country, however, kids try to use the word while their teachers and parents try to stop them. Bud Lawrence sells shirts, sunglasses, erasers, and notebooks. He deposits bigger and bigger checks into Nick's account and eventually opens a factory in Westfield to make frindle-branded baseball caps. In March, Westfield's city council votes to put up a sign declaring Westfield the home of "frindle."

Mrs. Granger seems to have given up or forgotten for the most part, though she puts the word "pen" on every single spelling test. Every student gets it wrong, as they write "frindle" instead. Nick enjoys the fame for a few weeks and tells his friends about riding in limos and being on TV, but he finds that he can't quite forget the whole thing, even after it dies down.

Mr. Allen's reaction to the fame shows that the pressure isn't just on Nick; it affects his entire family and it likely affects the entire town as well. This begins to complicate the idea of fame and suggests that it's not always a good or easy thing. In the case of Mr. Allen, it takes him away from his job and makes it harder to spend time with his family.



Though Mr. Allen and Bud see the contract as a way to make the fuss go away, the contract is actually important for a different reason: it cements Nick's role as the inventor of the word in a way that makes it impossible for anyone else to claim that they invented it first. Essentially, while it alleviates a burden from Mr. Allen, it also cements Nick's celebrity and ingenuity for the world to see.



The simple fact that Nick is earning money from frindle-branded merchandise suggests that while Mr. Allen sees fame as a burden, there are actually upsides to it. With the money, Nick will have far more power to do things or affect change once he gets control of the account, which shows how someone's role as a celebrity can turn them into a powerful figure in a number of ways.



The factory and the sign in particular indicate that "frindle" will have lasting positive effects on Nick's town, as it's creating jobs and is likely helping them in terms of tourism. This offers another way in which new language and civil protest can create positive change. Note too that adults around the country try to stop kids from using the word; this makes the use of frindle subversive—and as such, likely more attractive to young people.



Even though things have quieted down for the most part, Mrs. Granger's decision to put "pen" on her spelling tests allows her to preserve her students' momentum and make them feel as though they're still fighting for something.



CHAPTER 14: INSIDE NICK

Though Nick looks exactly the same on the outside, his experience with "frindle" makes him fear his big ideas a little bit. When he learns that people who buy things are called consumers and that consumers can put stores and restaurants out of business by not buying things, he immediately thinks of the horrendous food at the school cafeteria. He reasons that the students are all consumers and the cafeteria is a restaurant of sorts, and comes up with a plan to encourage kids to bring lunches from home until the quality of food improves at the cafeteria.

However, Nick remembers what happened with "frindle," and he fears that people will figure out that it was his idea to boycott the cafeteria food. He thinks that anything could happen and worries about getting in trouble, so he doesn't tell anyone about his idea. Mrs. Allen notices Nick looking sad and down, but he tells her that everything is fine. Mrs. Granger notices the change in Nick too. She thinks that Nick is now quiet, careful, and doesn't laugh or joke with his friends anymore.

Near the end of the school year, Nick remembers the letter that Mrs. Granger wrote. He figures that she forgot about it since she never gave it to him, and he's too afraid to bring it up. On the last day of school, he works up his nerve and goes to talk to Mrs. Granger after seventh period. She's happy to see him and says that his visit will save her from having to mail him a letter later. When Nick says he came for *the* letter, Mrs. Granger reminds him that she promised he'd get it when the whole thing is over—and it's not over. She says that Nick will know when it's over.

Mrs. Granger approaches Nick. They're almost the same height, and Nick notices that her eyes are soft but still powerful. She remarks that she's noticed how quiet Nick has been and tells him that he didn't do anything wrong. Mrs. Granger says that his idea was a good one, and she's been generally proud of the way that he handled everything. She tells Nick that he'll go on to do great things, and he shouldn't let a few difficult days slow him down. She shakes Nick's hand, looks him straight in the eye, and tells him to have a good summer. As Nick leaves, he wishes Mrs. Granger a good summer and reminds her to buy new frindles for next year.

Nick's experience with organizing protests and making things change allows him to come up with other ways he can affect change in his community. This shows that Nick learned a valuable lesson about how protests and organization work in the real world. This is something that Nick will continue to be able to use long after he's no longer a student, which reinforces Frindle's role as a novel that models political protest.



Nick's fear of what might happen implies that his brush with celebrity wasn't an entirely good thing, as he seems unable to consider that his celebrity might actually be able to help him in this endeavor. This suggests that Nick may have learned an incomplete lesson on what celebrity is and can do, as it is possible to embrace the power of celebrity and use it for good.



The insistence that the conflict isn't over is confusing for Nick, but remember that Mrs. Granger is only positioning herself as the bad guy to make sure that "frindle" makes it into the dictionary. This suggests that Nick isn't fully aware of what he's done with "frindle," as it never occurs to him that it might one day become a real word in the dictionary.



Mrs. Granger's pep talk makes it so that if Nick were to think about it, he might realize that she actually supported "frindle" and just fought him on it to teach him how exactly to stand up to authority figures. Especially when she speaks to him as more of an equal than an authority figure, she makes it clear to him that there's not actually anything wrong with standing up for himself and for what he believes in.



Because of Mrs. Granger's talk, Nick is able to find pride in what he did with "frindle." He enjoys thinking about the commotion he caused and as he progresses through school, he continues to have big ideas. In seventh grade, his big idea to improve the cafeteria food results in delicious meals and a visit from the state superintendent, who is interested to learn why Westfield has the most successful lunch program in the state. The narrator explains that Nick did many more things, but the end of this particular story about Nick takes place ten years later. During those ten years, "frindle" becomes a real word.

Again, when Nick is able to put what he learned into practice and improve the cafeteria lunch program, it models how the lessons of Frindle can be expanded upon and used in the real world to change other things. This also suggests that Nick accepted that he can use his celebrity and his leadership role for good, and that he can use his privilege to help these changes along.



CHAPTER 15: AND THE WINNER IS...

When Nick is a junior in college, two important things happen. First, he turns 21 and gains access to the money in the trust fund that Mr. Allen set up. Nick can barely understand how rich he is. He convinces his parents to accept money to travel, and then gives money to his brother James for James's two-year-old-daughter to go to college. Then, Nick buys himself a computer, some games, and a mountain bike, and tries to apply himself to his studies and forget about the rest of the money.

Getting control of the money reminds Nick that the celebrity status he achieved as a kid wasn't a bad thing—now, it gives him the ability to be generous to his family and plan for his future. The fact that he decides to forget about the rest of the money suggests that Mr. Allen's desire to teach Nick to save did happen, and Nick understands the value of not spending it all at once.



Second, Nick receives a package from Mrs. Granger one day in November. In the package is an edition of *Webster's College Dictionary*, a handwritten note on the front of the **dictionary**, and the envelope that she asked him to sign and date in September of his fifth grade year. The note on the front of the dictionary asks Nick to turn to page 541. On that page he finds an entry for "frindle." The note continues; Mrs. Granger says that she recommends her students use this dictionary and when she begins her lessons on how words are added, she asks them to look up "frindle." She writes that their battle is over now.

Mrs. Granger's admittance that she makes kids look up "frindle" now shows that she truly did support Nick's rebellion, as she wants her current students to understand that rebellion can bring about changes to the language. The word's inclusion in the dictionary also reinforces Mrs. Granger's lessons: once a word becomes popular enough, powerful people decide it can become part of the law of language.



Nick picks up the envelope and pulls out Mrs. Granger's letter. She opens by congratulating him, as if he's reading the letter, it means that "frindle" is in the **dictionary**. She admits that she was angry at first but realizes now that Nick would've made up a new word no matter what. Mrs. Granger says that what Nick did is actually the kind of thing that every teacher hopes for: the chance to see students test out what they learn in the real world. She says that she chose to play the villain and now, must ask Nick to forgive her. She says that when she began teaching, nobody had landed on the moon and there were no computers. The world is changing all the time and yet, words are still important. This is why she loves the dictionary: it's still relevant and it adapts and changes.

Now that Mrs. Granger doesn't need to fight Nick, she can admit that her understanding of the dictionary is actually different in practice than what she said it was ten years ago. Now that Nick has proven that words can change in real time, she's able to admit that the dictionary is actually a symbol of change. It reflects the world, both as it is today and as it was in the past. This reminds the reader that language is something alive and constantly changing, as language must adapt to describe new ideas and new inventions as they come along.



Nick thinks back to Mrs. Granger's eyes and understands what some of her looks had meant. She'd purposefully fought "frindle" just so that he'd continue to fight back. Nick also finds a small case in the box. In it is Mrs. Granger's favorite maroon pen with a note tucked under the clip. It reads, "frindle."

On Christmas morning, someone rings Mrs. Granger's doorbell. When she opens the door, there's no one there. She sees a wrapped gift on the step and notices an official-looking Express Mail envelope in her mailbox. After settling herself on the couch, Mrs. Granger opens the envelope first. It's from the school superintendent and it congratulates her: an anonymous former student established a trust fund for college scholarships with a donation of a million dollars, and the student named it "The Lorelai Granger Students' Fund." Mrs. Granger thinks it must be a mistake, but she decides to wait until the next day to call the superintendent and set things straight.

Mrs. Granger turns to the gift and opens the note first. It's clearly from a fifth-grade boy and reads that she's his favorite teacher. Though she glares at the spelling mistakes, she chuckles. Then, she starts to unwrap the box, expecting a macaroni or yarn craft. Instead, she finds a blue velvet case with a gold fountain pen inside. Engraved on the pen is a note saying that the object belongs to Mrs. Granger, and she can call it what she wants. It's from Nick Allen.

Now that Nick understands Mrs. Granger's actions, he understands that she was aware that in order to protest and organize, one needs someone to protest against.



The novel implies that Nick set up the scholarship fund with what was left in the savings trust from "frindle" proceeds. By naming it after Mrs. Granger, Nick thanks her for her role in making "frindle" into a real word. By setting up the fund in the first place, he makes sure that future students will have the resources to learn the lessons that he did and in doing so, be able to stage their own protests and create change.



Again, by referring to the pen as just an object and allowing Mrs. Granger to call it whatever she wants, Nick shows Mrs. Granger that he respects her authority as a teacher and understands her role in the rebellion. Without her, "frindle" wouldn't have ever made it into the dictionary.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Brock, Zoë. "Frindle." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 6 Dec 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Brock, Zoë. "Frindle." LitCharts LLC, December 6, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/frindle>.

To cite any of the quotes from *Frindle* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Clements, Andrew. *Frindle*. Simon and Schuster. 1996.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Clements, Andrew. *Frindle*. New York: Simon and Schuster. 1996.